

Oral Questions

ers. He was very clear in stating that this country is undergoing a very great transformation in preparation for the 21st century and that his heartfelt wish is that Quebecers will participate fully in these changes for the 21st century. That was the Prime Minister's message.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister is not being very clear. What she was asked involved the right to veto, changes with the consent of Quebecers, these being the words of the Prime Minister, but as usual she is not answering the question. I shall attempt another.

Can the Minister of Labour tell us what reassurance there is for Quebecers in such a statement by the Prime Minister, when in 1992 he overrode the virtually unanimous opposition of the parties represented in the Quebec National Assembly, including the Liberal Party of Quebec, of which she was not so very long ago a member, and the leader of the present Liberal Party had voted against unilateral patriation of the Constitution? This Prime Minister was therefore identifying himself as a Quebecer at the time, and Quebecers were represented at that time by 74 Liberal members in the House of Commons. How can there be any confidence in a person who has reneged on his commitment to Quebec?

• (1425)

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the present Prime Minister of Canada is very aware of the whole constitutional history of this country. He is also well aware of what has happened in Quebec. He understands very well, too, the disappointment some Quebecers may have felt at certain points in the history of this country. For the past two years, however, this Prime Minister has been leading this country; let us look at what he has done in those two years to respond to the needs of all Canadians, to respond to their concerns, their needs.

When the Prime Minister of Canada speaks, I feel that we can judge him very well by the actions he has undertaken in the past two years as the Prime Minister of this country. He did not govern by "referendum" for the past two years; he has acted, and he has governed this country.

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[English]

FEDERAL SPENDING

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the separatists say that Canada cannot change and will not change but Reformers insist Canada is going to change, and without the help of constitutional lawyers and the federal-provincial wrangling they bring.

One of the real changes Quebec and every other province wants is a limit on federal spending. It is unchecked federal spending that has led to federal encroachment in areas of provincial jurisdiction, huge deficits and debt and a staggering tax burden for all Canadians. Legislation is required to limit federal spending power.

My question is for the finance minister. Is the federal government open to that kind of change, simply limiting federal spending power, a practical change that can be accomplished without constitutional wrangling?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear on this side of the House and have agreed with the position put forward by the hon. member and his party as to the need for fundamental change.

We have also said in two successive budgets that what we were doing was not simply cutting spending but redefining the role of government because that must happen in the modern age.

In that area there are items on which we may or may not agree. We have said that as far as we are concerned the best controls on spending we can have are short term targets on which the government's feet are held to the fire. That is what has enabled us to hit our targets consistently and that is what we intend to continue with.

Mr. Preston Manning (Calgary Southwest, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the biggest problem with our current Constitution is not so much its content but its application. The federal government has used its spending power to encroach on provincial areas of jurisdiction such as natural resources, manpower training, social services, language, culture and so forth.

The answer to the separatists is a more balanced federation which can be done by re-examining and reducing the federal role in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

Is the federal government open to this type of change, a simple withdrawal from provincial areas of jurisdiction, again changes that can be made without constitutional wrangling?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, not only is the federal government open to that kind of change but in looking at what has happened over the course of the last two years, we have done this in a number of areas.

The hon. member should look at the great openness displayed by the Minister of Human Resources Development concerning ways he would work with the provinces. He should look at what the Minister of Natural Resources has done. Look at regional agencies. Within Quebec we have taken 43 programs down to one to concentrate on small and medium size business and the